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ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology

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COURSE OVERVIEW:

“Why am I doing what I am doing the way I am doing it (and not another way)?”

In the 12th century, Anselm of Canterbury expressed the desire to deepen his knowledge and therefore also his relationship to God as “faith seeking understanding.” Others have stated it by asking “what would Jesus do?” or, “how can I be faithful in this time and place?” All of these questions have a key common denominator—a conscious effort to understand in order to better our service and our relationship to God, to our communities, to the world. This conscious effort demands that we explore the variety of methods that have often led to very different responses to the same question. These responses, articulated in the corpus of Christian doctrine, reflect the differing theologies that not only vie for our attention but point to the role of reflection, understanding and judgment in the task of theology. In this sense, the title of our course may be somewhat misleading as it suggests that there might be one method or praxis in theology. Our various readings covering a variety of topics and methods in the Christian faith will prove that this is not the case. Though questions may remain the same, our differing contexts and historical situations may call for a reexamination of previous responses and often, a reformulation of the very questions themselves.

In short, the task of theology is not a finished process. It is our calling as leaders and ministers to attend to this process with the utmost diligence and prayer.

As stated in the catalog, this is an introductory course that will help prepare you for all course offerings in theology.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
(These objectives are taken from the core course description and are normative for the Wilmore and Orlando campuses)

Upon completion of this course, the student will have an introductory knowledge of critical theological method, enabling them to:

1. Describe how classical Greek\Roman philosophy influenced the manner in which the Early Christian Apologists and the Early Church Fathers did theology;
2. Articulate the impact of the Enlightenment upon modern theology, particularly the influence of Kant's philosophy and its contribution to such movements as liberalism, existentialism, and neo-orthodoxy.
3. Describe the rise of the modern historical consciousness, particularly the relation between critical history and Christian faith;
4. Understand the significance of the transition from premodern to modern and postmodern thought, with special reference to the shift from ontology (premodern) to epistemology (modern) to hermeneutics (postmodern);
5. Identify the key points in the transition from modern to postmodern paradigms, especially hermeneutical phenomenology, postliberalism, and deconstructionism;
6. Articulate the influence of postmodern science upon theological method;
7. Appreciate Wesley's methodical use of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience;
8. Apply critical theological method to the effective practice of Christian ministry in the postmodern age.

SECTION ONE:
Early church to pre-modern

The Discipline of Theology: What is theology? What is method in theology? What is praxis? How and why are these important?

Class 1/Sept. 3

- Reason, Scripture, Experience, Tradition and the Compartmentalization of Theology
- What is theology? The functions of theology
- What is method? What is praxis?
- “Dismantling my Theological Edifice”

Class 2/Sept. 10

- Explorations in theology. The role and functions of Theology continued.

➢ Assignment:

1. Readings

   Origen, *On First Principles*
   *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*

2. For discussion

   After reading the above, be prepared to discuss the following questions:
   - *What is theological about this narrative/piece?*
   - *How do you understand its function(s) within theology?*
   - *What methods are evident?*
   - *How does it inform your praxis?*
   - *What questions does it raise?*
3. Written
   Two questions per reading to be turned in before class.

SECTION TWO
Impact of Scholasticism, Philosophy, Enlightenment and Modernity upon Method in Theology

How do you do theology? The methods and materials

Class 3/ Sept.
Christianity, “the true philosophy?”: The role of reason/philosophy in theology

➢ Assignment:
   1. Readings
      Justin Martyr, Chs. I-VII (Greek apologist of 2nd c.) in ANF, Vol. 1
      Anselm of Canterbury, “Proslogion” ch. I in Anselm of Canterbury
      Wesley: Sermon 70: “The case of Reason Impartially Considered

   2. For discussion
      • What are the theological differences, similarities?
      • How are their methods different, similar?
      • How does their method impact their outcome?
      • How do these inform, critique your theology and praxis?

Class 4/ Sept. 24
The role of reason continued
The role of experience:
   o Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres*: The Role of context in method in theology
     (or in “doing” theology)
   o The role and function of “dichos” (proverbs) or “sayings” in contemporary language
   o Other contexts and our own considered
   o Discussion of readings

➢ Assignment:
   1. Read
      Choose readings from a or b and read c.

   a. The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability by Nancy Eisland, chs. 2, 5, 6, Pp. 31-48, 89-119.
b. Clement of Alexandria’s “The Rich Man’s Salvation 11-17, in Documents in Early Christian Thought, pp. 203-206
   The Cost of Discipleship by D. Bonhoeffer, pp. 11-35, 45-60
   c. Schleiermacher: his First Speech from “Speeches on Religion to the Cultured Among its Despisers,” pp. 67-76
      Emmanuel Kant, What is the Enlightenment.

2. For discussion
   • What are the similarities/differences in the paired readings? (especially “b)
   • How do you understand the role of reason and experience in theology?
   • What questions would you bring to the texts?
   • How do these readings impact my praxis?

3. Written
   A one page paper describing your social, political, economic, gendered, cultural, racial/ethnic, educational, context/background.
   Write 5 questions that arise from reflecting on that background and your own call to ministry or praxis.

*(“Tell me with whom you walk and I’ll tell you who you are”)

How do you read a text? What makes it authoritative?

Class 5/ Oct. 1

The relationship between experience and hermeneutics
Hermeneutics and the search for meaning
   o Hermeneutics of Suspicion,
   o Hermeneutics of generosity
   o Insider/Outsider perspectives
   o Communication theory

➢ Assignment:
1. Readings
   “Gutierrez: Orthopraxis, Not Orthodoxy,” in RCT pp. 388-393
   “Ruether: The Prophetic Iconoclastic Christ,” in RCT, pp.393-397
   “Symbol, Myth, and Ritual: The Method of the Minjung,” by Young-Chan Ro in LEV, pp. 41-48

2. For discussion
• What are the different hermeneutical tools being used?
• How does experience relate to perspective in the readings?
• What questions do you bring to the texts?
• How do these readings and perspectives inform your own praxis?

Class 6/ Oct. 8
The role of hermeneutics continued

➢ Assignment:
1. Readings
   All of the readings below are in RCT
   Agustine: Free Will and Sin, pp. 176-180
   Luther: Sin and Grace, pp. 180-185
   Tennant: Difficulties In The Classic Doctrine, pp.185-189
   Kierkegaard: Sin as Despair, pp. 189-192
   Niebuhr: The Pride of Power, pp.192-196
   Ricoeur: Paradox of the Serville Will, pp.196-199
   Farrer: Beyond Augustinian Theodicy, pp. 199-204

2. For discussion
   After reading the material assigned for this day be prepared to discuss the following questions:
   - “What is the basic problem with the human condition?”
   - What are the different interpretations of “sin”? How do we define “sin?”
   - What is the proposed solution to that problem?
   - What are the components in the readings below that lead to different interpretations?
   - How are these components important for your own context and praxis?

3. Written:
   b. Write a one to two-page response to the following questions:
      - What are the components in the readings that lead to different interpretations?
      - How are these components important for your own context and praxis?

Note: you may take the readings one by one and/or compare and contrast them in relation to the above question.

Class 7/ Oct. 15
The role of scripture and tradition
   o The development of the canon
   o A liberationist reading of scripture (exercise)
Assignment: The Epistle of Barnabas, pp. 50-61 (This is an ancient document, prob. c. 135 C.E., sometimes included in the canonical writings)


“Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Imagination: A Redefinition” by Justo L. Gonzalez, pp. 61-77 in The Ties that Bind

“The Bible and Mujerista Theology” by Ada Maria Isazi-Diaz, pp. 261-269, in LEV

“Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World,” by Kwok Pui-Lan, in LEV, pp. 271-282

“Mohler: Tradition as the Living Word,” pp. 37-41 in RCT

Class 8 / Oct.22 MIDTERM
(Take home)

SECTION THREE
Post-modernity

Contemporary Theological Paradigms and Method in theology

Class 9/ Oct. 29
Postmodernity and Christianity

Assignment:

“Postmodernity, Black Theology and Liberation in the U.S. A.: Michel Foucault and James H. Cone,” in Postmodernity and the Americas


Class 10/ Nov. 5
Postmodernity continued

Class 11/ Nov. 12
Class presentations

Class 12/ Nov. 19
Class presentations

Class 13/ Dec. 3
Class presentations

Class 14/ Dec. 10
Class presentations

FINAL CLASS
NOTE:
1. All assignments are due on the date of the class in which they are placed. For example, the assignments for Sept. 17 are due Sept. 17 and, so forth.
2. All the readings are on reserve at the library. The bibliography for this course, should you be interested in purchasing any of these books, is included below. (Note, by bibliography I am referring to the books that contain our assigned readings. Otherwise, please ask the librarian for the copies of the readings that have been placed on reserve.)

READINGS:
NOTE: All assigned readings are on reserve in the library.
The following abbreviations are used throughout the syllabus.


Sources:
González, Justo L. and Zaida Maldonado Perez. Introduction to Christian Theology.


### Method and Praxis ST501

**LIST OF STUDENTS WITH DATE OF PRESENTATION:**

#### NOVEMBER 12

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<thead>
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<td>Morris, Frank</td>
<td>Buttrick, <em>Prayer</em></td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Wright, Gabe</td>
<td>Pannenberg, <em>What is Man?: Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective</em></td>
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<td>Smith, Jeff</td>
<td>The Concept of Dread</td>
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<td>Wells-Courrier, Arlene</td>
<td><em>Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach</em></td>
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<td>Hopkins, Mark</td>
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<td>Lindsey, Coy</td>
<td>Boff, <em>Liberation Theology</em></td>
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<td>Thompson, Nick</td>
<td>Lampe, <em>The Seal of the Spirit</em></td>
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<td>Moseley, Debra-Suzanne</td>
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<td>Bera, Laura</td>
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<td>Lohse, Adam</td>
<td>Neibuh: <em>Meaning of Revelation</em></td>
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<td>Henry, Sue</td>
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<td>Kaufman, <em>God the Problem</em></td>
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<td>MacLaren, Pat</td>
<td>Neibuh, <em>Christ and Culture</em></td>
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<td>Heffelfinger, Katie</td>
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<td>Binkley, Jessica</td>
<td><em>Brueggemann, (The Bible and Postmodern Imagination)</em></td>
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<td>Isaacson, James</td>
<td>The Doctrine of Original Sin According to Scripture, Reason and Experience</td>
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<td>Oplinger, Robert</td>
<td>Niebuhr, <em>The Nature and Destiny of Man</em></td>
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<td>Kundinger, Hazel</td>
<td>Augustine, <em>City of God</em></td>
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<td>Alexander, Joyce</td>
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<td>Obermayer Smith, Deborah</td>
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